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OO RUEH DU RUEH MR RUEH RN  
DE RUEH KI #1175/01 3661333  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
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FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8991  
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE IMMEDIATE  
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 001175

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [UNSC](#) [MOPS](#) [CG](#)  
SUBJECT: DRC FOREIGN MINISTER ON THE EAST, RELATIONS WITH  
RWANDA

REF: KINSHASA 1081

Classified By: Ambassador William Garvelink for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

1. (C) During a December 30 courtesy call by the Ambassador, Foreign Minister Alexis Thambwe Mwamba said he was cautiously optimistic about improving DRC-Rwandan relations. Thambwe identified the task of eliminating illegal economic activity in war-torn North Kivu as key to ending the conflict. According to Thambwe, the GDRC has rejected a Rwandan request to deploy two battalions in the DRC to combat the FDLR under the joint DRC-Rwandan operational plan targeting the FDLR (reftel). Thambwe pointed to Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa as preferred troop-contributing countries for the MONUC plus-up. Thambwe expressed support for an EU bridging force to fill the gap until additional MONUC troops are on the ground. Thambwe said that the DRC would soon announce the appointment of a new Ambassador to Washington. President Kabila would like to make an official visit to Washington in 2009. End Summary.

DRC-Rwandan Relations: Diplomatic, Economic, and Security

2. (C) During a December 30 courtesy call, new DRC Foreign Minister Alexis Thambwe Mwamba told the Ambassador that the GDRC would pursue complete normalization of relations with Rwanda, including the re-opening of embassies and exchange of ambassadors in the first trimester of 2009. Thambwe characterized the discussions with Rwanda under the "four-by-four" format as frank and productive. According to the FM, it had been difficult to convince many in the DRC "political class" that engaging Rwanda diplomatically was a necessary step to promote regional stability. Thambwe voiced concerns as to whether there was a real will in Kigali to improve DRC-Rwandan relations.

3. (C) Thambwe emphasized that the international community and the regional governments needed to tackle the core problem in the Kivus: the economic status quo, which favored the illegal armed groups at the expense of legitimate regional trade. In this vein, the DRC advocated an enhanced role for the Economic Community of the Great Lakes States (CEPGL). Thambwe added that the MFA had submitted to the Presidency a list of four individuals to represent the DRC on CEPGL fora.

4. (C) Thambwe said that senior DRC and Rwandan military leaders, including ministers of defense and the CHODs, were meeting December 29-30 in Goma to iron out the joint operational plan to combat the FDLR (reftel). According to

Thambwe, the Rwandan side had proposed sending two battalions to North Kivu to conduct an operation against the FDLR similar to Operation Lightning Thunder, which Uganda was carrying out against LRA rebels in northeastern DRC. Thambwe maintained that he and other GDRC officials rejected the idea, noting that the civilian population would not support large numbers of Rwandan troops in the region given the history of Rwandan involvement in the DRC. (Comment: this would undoubtedly be unpalatable for most in the Congolese political class as well. End Comment.)

#### Thambwe: New MONUC Troops Should Come From Africa

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15. (C) Thambwe characterized the new MONUC mandate as an improvement, but weak in some aspects regarding MONUC-FARDC relations. President Kabila, according to Thambwe, would soon demarche his counterparts in Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa to ask their countries to contribute one battalion each to the additional MONUC force. Thambwe maintained that these countries were ready to contribute at the political level, but that they all required equipment and logistical support to commit to MONUC. Thambwe added that, during a recent meeting with French FM Kouchner, he had broached the idea of EU material support for African countries that are willing to contribute troops to MONUC.

#### Still Hoping For An EU Bridging Force

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16. (C) Regarding a possible EU bridging force to fill the gap before the new MONUC troops are on the ground, Thambwe opined that there are three strains of opinion within the EU: those, primarily the UK and Germany, that are opposed to the idea; the French, who have supporters (Kouchner) and skeptics (Sarkozy); and a group of smaller EU Member States who are more predisposed to support an EU bridging force. This latter group, in Thambwe's view, included the Dutch, Sweden, Spain, Greece, and, of course, Belgium, which is ready to commit 400 troops to such an operation. Thambwe said that it would be important that such a force is not under MONUC command and control. He claimed that UN Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations Alain Le Roy was trying to devise a formula so that an EU bridging force would be independent of, yet complementary to, MONUC.

#### DRC-USG Relations

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17. (C) Thambwe noted that the GDRC would soon nominate a new Ambassador to Washington; he has already proposed a name to President Kabila. Kabila, according to Thambwe, wanted to visit the U.S. officially "a couple months after the U.S. inauguration."

18. (C) Thambwe expressed hope that the incoming U.S. Administration would demonstrate "a balanced view" vis-a-vis the region's governments. Too often, in Thambwe's opinion, the U.S. and other western governments had claimed that there was "no proof" of Rwandan support for the CNDP. Thambwe said that the recent UN Group of Experts report had presented irrefutable evidence of Rwandan involvement in Eastern DRC. He added that, hopefully, the report will help overcome Rwanda's state of denial and the region can benefit from "a new spirit of transparency."

#### Biographical Note and Comment

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19. (C) On substance and style, Thambwe appears to be a

step-up from his predecessor, Antipas Mbusa Nyamwisi, the current Minister of Decentralization and Urban and Regional Planning. First impressions indicate he is more engaged than his predecessor on the situation in the East. Starting in the mid-1960s, Thambwe accumulated a large fortune in the mining industry. Politically, he has "changed spots" frequently: he served in positions of influence under Mobutu; he supported RDC-Goma in the late 1990s before aligning with the MLC; he subsequently left the MLC after falling out with Jean-Pierre Bemba.

¶10. (C) Perhaps most importantly, Thambwe reportedly has close links to Kabila's mother and mother-in-law, both of whom are, as is Thambwe, members of Maniema Province's educated elite. In addition, since his appointment in October, Thambwe has displayed impressive media skills for domestic and international audiences, an attribute that had been woefully inferior to the CNDP's PR machine. It appears that Kabila has entrusted Thambwe, under the watchful eye of hawkish CHOD Didier Etumba and influential Presidential Advisor Augustin Katumba, with attempting to broker a political settlement. (Note: Thambwe, Etumba, Katumba, and Head of the DRC National Police John Numbi comprise the DRC's team on the four-by-four talks with Rwanda. End Note.)  
GARVELINK